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TRAINING FOR CITIZENSHIP THROUGH PRACTICE

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The particular phase of training for citizenship selected as the basis of this article is pupil participation or co-operation in solving problems of the high-school student body. Of late we have heard much about training for citizenship, preparation for citizenship, teaching Americanism, and inspiring pupils with patriotism. Everywhere the hope is expressed that the schools may turn out better citizens now than ever before, and yet no one knows just how the school may best meet this responsibility. Without this definite knowledge, it is far easier to theorize about how good citizens can be turned out as the product of the school than to accomplish this aim.

Some pin their faith to the teaching of history and civic problems. Undoubtedly an understanding of modern world-problems and an intimate contact with the social problems of today are very important factors in training for citizenship. The knowledge of modern world-problems is, indeed, an essential background to an understanding of the civic problems of today. More schools should emphasize modern history. Some wish to rely upon incidental instruction—the precept and example of teachers and prominent citizens of the community. Some depend upon the spirit built up through clean athletics and sports, fairness in play and in class conduct, while others rely upon the spirit of the recitation to do much for the pupils. Still others seek to teach citizenship through the general assembly and the spirit built up in such meetings. All of these and many other means are no doubt worth while and every such opportunity should be seized upon to teach citizenship, to teach the gospel of unselfish service, of fairness, of co-operation, and of individual responsibility in a democracy.

But one of the most profound means of teaching citizenship is through practice. If boys and girls are to respect and obey our laws and be tolerant toward those who must execute them, a genuine opportunity to solve school-citizenship problems is excellent training. This is not theory. No one can fail to be deeply impressed with the faithfulness with which pupils live up to rules of conduct which have originated in the student body, nor with the spirit in which pupils set about their job of handling a problem that has been really turned over to them. Pupils are at their best when they can be made to feel this responsibility.

In one high school in which the classes are organized in keeping with the spirit of student responsibility, teachers can leave their classes at any time without even asking the class chairman to continue the work. The chairman assumes his responsibility at once if he is present; if not, the class at once selects someone to take charge. I had occasion to drop in upon such a class one day. The teacher had gone on a necessary errand to another room. It was some moments before I discovered that the teacher was not in the room. The pupils noticing that I was looking for someone asked if I wished to see the teacher. They said he had left a few minutes previously and then continued their work.

Democratic citizenship implies just such personal responsibility and responsiveness to the duties and obligations before the individual and the group. A social point of view in the school is dependent upon a social atmosphere. This atmosphere is impossible without pupil responsibility at least to some degree. It cannot be manufactured, created, superimposed, or forced upon the student body from above. It must be as natural as the expression of social instincts in adult life and hence must spring from the student body itself.

Student participation in school government and in the solution of many of the problems of the student body is one means of training for the assumption of the duties and responsibilities of adult society. Student participation will help develop thinking; it will help develop obedience to and respect for our laws and customs; it will help foster the spirit of fair play and unselfish service. In short, it will help build up the strength of character and self-control

essential alike to a high type of school spirit and of real citizenship. After all, school spirit, whatever it is, and community spirit are but different aspects of the same thing. The one is just as genuinely a social matter as the other, with the same laws of society operating in practically the same way in both instances. The factors of control are much the same. Autocratic methods are resented as keenly in the one instance as the other. Injustice, partiality, and laxness in administration lead to the same inevitable ends in both cases. Brute force gets just about as far in the genuine conversion of the high-school lad as it does with his father. Self-control, respect for the rights of others, and real obedience to the mandates of the group must spring largely from within. Suppression is a thing of last resort. Therefore, if in the school we are to train for positive, upstanding citizenship in the community, we must place some responsibility upon high-school boys and girls for the solution of their school-citizenship problems. In other words, we must provide for the training of citizenship through practice.

Superintendent I. M. Allen, of Springfield, Illinois, has expressed most forcibly the necessity of practice in training for citizenship. In addressing the department of secondary education at the 1919 meeting of the National Education Association in Milwaukee, he said in part:

In Germany is illustrated a nation seeking to establish autocracy through a system of education. She succeeded. Is it possible for us through training in the schools to establish a co-operating democracy? Yes, but the task is more difficult than the education for autocracy. Training children to feel, think, and act co-operatively is more difficult than training children to feel, think, and act dependently. We shall not, however, despair because of the enormity of our task.

Primarily we must believe that the teacher is a self-directing, co-operating control machine placed in the school for the purpose of training similar machines to function. There will be many breakdowns in the school, and there will be times when the chief engineer will desire to switch back on to the old autocratic controls, but if he really understands himself, the machines intrusted to his care, and the purpose of the school he will be willing to blunder in the manipulation, to be disappointed in the day's quantitative output, because he is concerned, not in a product made in Germany, but in a product in the making in America.

This chief engineer is the American school teacher, and the wonderful, co-ordinating, co-operative, self-directing, and self-improving machines are American boys and girls in our public schools. The force that operates within such a school is the socializing force of democracy. If we really believe in it we shall operate our schools according to its laws. Our chief concern in the dawn of democracy is to discover its laws and then to apply them.

Student participation in school control is fundamental because of the inherent premium which democracy places upon the integrity of the action of the individual who thinks and wilfully acts with due consideration to those about him. It is fundamental because it implies co-operation

The word participation has been used purposely. Student participation is not to be confused with the traditional notion of self-government. Self-government schemes in American secondary schools have universally been failures or fakes. There may be a few exceptions, but these when investigated will be found to be in reality schemes in which the pupils are co-operating with the faculty.

Pupils have the right to the guidance and advice of the faculty in the solution of the problems of the corporate life of the school. To deny the pupils this right is to close one great avenue of training in citizenship. Rather should there be open and frank co-operation between pupils and teachers in matters of this kind. Pupils must assume the responsibilities of citizenship gradually, and to ask them to arise and walk before they have yet attained the necessary nicety of balance is to invite defeat.

Self-government as usually conceived and traditionally administered requires a most complicated machinery. Legislative, executive, and judicial departments must be provided and the intricacies of the system, together with the inability of pupils to exercise properly the executive authority, sooner or later make it mandatory that the authorities interfere, and this has always proved disastrous. Self-government creates a sort of barrier between pupils and authorities in the solution of student problems. If the authorities "dip" in, the pupils at once conclude that there is unwarranted interference and dominance. Self-government implies, of course, the creation of public opinion among the pupils,

but also a method of dealing with non-conformists. Ideally it presupposes the elimination of disciplinary cases, but among human beings the ideal is impossible of attainment. Therefore, self-government must concern itself with problems belonging properly to the faculty.

Student co-operation or participation, on the other hand, is built upon the theory of mutual co-operation between the faculty and the student body. The faculty feels free to work with the pupils, and pupils do not hesitate to consult the faculty. In doing so, there is no danger that the pupils will feel that the faculty is interfering. There is a mutual confidence and spirit of helpfulness back of the co-operation. Student participation implies the development of a favorable public opinion but not the responsibility of settling disciplinary cases, except as such cases can be settled through the contempt in which they are held by the pupils generally. Dealing with these cases remains primarily the work of the authorities. Participation in the sense in which it is used here leaves the pupils free to work constructively upon such problems as concern the student body generally. They are freed from the necessity of dealing with individual cases.

The machinery by which the pupils may co-operate with the faculty should be simple. There should be some sort of central organization or body with power of initiation with the advice of some member or committee of the faculty. This central body must have some means of direct access to the student body. If the school is organized on the home-room basis, then home-room representatives may become the means of contact with the pupils. There should probably be a constitution, simple in character, and designed rather to govern the methods of organization than to enumerate the powers and duties of the central body and home-room representatives. It should be free of legislative matters.

While the constitution now in force in the Lincoln High School has been found imperfect in some ways, it has served its purpose for about three years. It was developed in keeping with the views advanced in this article.

CONSTITUTION OF THE STUDENT COUNCIL

ARTICLE I—PURPOSE AND NAME

In order to foster the sentiment for law and order in the school, to provide opportunities for student co-operation in the internal government of the school, to promote worthy student activities and to promote the general welfare of the school, this constitution establishing the student government organization in the Lincoln High School has been adopted by the provisional student council and faculty committee on student affairs.

ARTICLE II—FORM OF ORGANIZATION

The student-government organization shall consist of a home-room representative body and a student council.

ARTICLE III—MEMBERSHIP IN THE STUDENT COUNCIL

SECTION 1. Membership in the student council shall consist of twenty members from the school at large, viz., six Senior boys and six Senior girls; three Junior boys and three Junior girls; one Sophomore boy and one Sophomore girl.

SEC. 2. The editor-in-chief of *The Advocate* and the captain of each athletic team shall be members of this organization. Each captain shall serve for twelve weeks.

SEC. 3. When the editor-in-chief of *The Advocate* is a boy, four Senior boys and six Senior girls shall be elected to membership. When the editor-in-chief of *The Advocate* is a girl, five Senior boys and five Senior girls shall be elected to membership.

SEC. 4. Eligibility requirements. (Eligibility requirements are the same as those for participation in interscholastic athletics.)

SEC. 5. Members of the student council shall, by virtue of their position, be members of the home-room representative body.

ARTICLE IV—OFFICERS OF STUDENT COUNCIL

SECTION 1. The officers of the student council shall be a president, a vice-president, and a secretary.

SEC. 2. These officers shall hold office for one semester.

SEC. 3. When the president is a boy, the vice-president shall be a girl; when the president is a girl, the vice-president shall be a boy.

SEC. 4. The boy holding the highest office in the student council shall preside over all boys' meetings.

SEC. 5. The girl holding the highest office in the student council shall preside over all girls' meetings.

ARTICLE V—ELECTION OF MEMBERS OF STUDENT COUNCIL

SECTION 1. Election of members of the student council shall be held within the first five weeks after the opening of school in September.

SEC. 2. A committee consisting of the principal of the school, two members of the faculty committee on student affairs and five members of the home-room representative body, elected by the home-room representative body, shall nominate thirty-six members of the school at large for membership in the student council.

SEC. 3. Members shall be elected by the school at large by ballot from the thirty-six nominations submitted by the nominating committee.

SEC. 4. Election shall be held not less than three nor more than five days after the nominations have been made.

SEC. 5. Ballots shall be counted in the office under the direction of the principal.

SEC. 6. The names of those elected to the student council shall be published at least three days before the election of officers.

ARTICLE VI—ELECTION OF OFFICERS OF STUDENT COUNCIL

SECTION 1. The president and vice-president of the student council shall be Seniors.

SEC. 2. Officers shall be nominated and elected at the first meeting of the student council, to be held within a week after the election of members.

SEC. 3. Nomination of officers shall be by ballot.

SEC. 4. Balloting for officers shall be continued until by successive elimination of the name receiving the smallest number of votes the highest shall have received a majority vote.

ARTICLE VII—MEMBERSHIP IN HOME-ROOM REPRESENTATIVE BODY

SECTION 1. Membership of this organization shall consist of one member from each Freshman, Sophomore, and Junior home-room group, and of three members from each Senior home-room group, and of all members of the student council including ex officio members.

SEC. 2. Members shall serve for one year or until their successors are elected.

SEC. 3. Members shall serve until the election of the succeeding home-room representative body.

SEC. 4. Eligibility requirements (same as for council members).

ARTICLE VIII—OFFICERS

SECTION 1. The officers of the student council shall be ex officio, the officers of the home-room representative body.

ARTICLE IX—ELECTION OF MEMBERS

SECTION 1. The election of members shall be by ballot.

SEC. 2. Election of members shall take place in home rooms, with home-room teacher in charge.

SEC. 3. Election shall be held during the first four weeks after the opening of school in September.

SEC. 4. Vacancies shall be filled by special election. Pupils elected to fill vacancies shall serve till the next general election.

ARTICLE X—AMENDMENT

SECTION 1. This constitution may be amended by a two-thirds vote of the home-room representative body, a two-thirds vote of the student council, the approval of the faculty committee on student affairs, and the approval of the principal.

SEC. 2. Amendments must originate either in the student council or in the faculty committee on student affairs and must be submitted first to the home-room representative body.

SEC. 3. A proposed amendment must be on the table one week in the home-room representative body before final action on it may be taken by that body.

ARTICLE XI—SOURCE OF POWER

Since the principal and faculty are directly responsible to the superintendent and to the Board of Education for the welfare of the school, it is expressly understood that all student powers, herein set forth, are delegated by the principal and faculty and may be revoked by them at any time.

ARTICLE XII—RATIFICATION

This constitution shall become effective upon ratification by the faculty committee on student affairs and approval by the principal.

ARTICLE XIII—RULES OF PROCEDURE

SECTION 1. The student council and home-room representatives shall have power to adopt by-laws and rules of procedure.

The constitution is going through the process of amendment, some eight or ten amendments being at the present time before the student-affairs committee of the faculty for approval or rejection.

It is one thing to discuss the advisability of having student participation and even to adopt it, but quite another to make it a success. The problem of making it operate effectively is by far the most difficult one which confronts the faculty. From the experience of those who have worked upon this problem some suggestions can be made not only in the matter of paving the way for student co-operation but in getting the council under way and insuring success to the movement.

First, the faculty must have faith in the plan. Together the principal and teachers should study the problem and arrive at an understanding or creed upon the subject. The fullest discussions possible and informal conferences between teachers and principal and among teachers themselves should be encouraged until everyone is convinced that the proposal is worthy of trial. In one high school the principal decided to try self-government in one of the study halls. The teachers did not support it and after one semester it had to be abandoned. The teachers have a perfect right to pass judgment upon any matter which may affect their work and the spirit of the school.

Second, the student body must be as fully prepared as possible for the innovation. This can be done to some degree in the home rooms by placing responsibility upon the pupils. The teachers will find many opportunities in the home room to further the idea. In the classrooms, class leaders can be encouraged to take charge of class work in the absence of teachers. In the assembly the principal has a rare opportunity to exploit his theory both in his methods of control and in his talks. Most high-school pupils yearn for freedom and release from what they call kindergarten methods. The principal cannot afford to lose the opportunity to confer with the natural leaders in the school. Ten or twenty such pupils committed to the idea can work wonders.

Third, after the way has thus been paved, it may be found quite expedient to call in a committee of perhaps six pupils, two from each of the three upper classes, and with their co-operation appoint a provisional council which shall, in co-operation with a committee of the faculty, develop a constitution and serve until such time as it can be adopted and put into operation.

Fourth, a standing committee of the faculty with which the council or central body can work directly is very desirable.

Fifth, full provision for communication on the part of the council or central body with the pupils is absolutely essential. The success of the council is dependent upon wide and effective publicity. A period in the school day can well be set aside when the council can meet with the home-room representatives and likewise when the representatives can meet with their constituency. This cannot be stressed too strongly.

After all these preliminaries there is still much to do to insure the success of the student organization. The matter of the choice of student council members is most important. Pupils should be encouraged to take an active interest in the election and in the choice of good, competent officers. They should look upon the school as a small community and the council members as their representatives. When the idea of the council is well understood and pupils have become interested, they will offer suggestions as to means of acquainting the student body with the candidates and their qualifications for office. They will suggest, for example, that candidates present themselves before the pupils in assembly or that class periods be devoted to the discussion of the necessary qualifications of a good council member; sometimes they will want to use the period for the discussion of candidates. Every opportunity to further this spirit should be welcomed. As a practical project in social science or in English the preparation for intelligent voting at the coming council election will not be easily surpassed. Those responsible for the success of the student council should see to it that the election of student council members becomes an event of great importance in the school.

The next most important consideration is to see that the council in the beginning attacks only such problems as it can solve. Let the beginning be simple. Let the council make good by handling its easiest problems first. It must be saved from defeat. The council in its early days must be able to say that it carries out everything it undertakes.

The council may well begin upon such problems as the order in the cafeteria or the waiting line, and the general conduct of pupils in the corridors. The problems must be simple, problems which the council can attack directly. It can pass from these to the larger projects of assembly control, management and control of social activities, athletics, boys' and girls' meetings, tardiness and irregular attendance, conduct in the classrooms, and the elimination of customs and traditions that are detrimental to the best interests of the school.

In the Lincoln High School the council in its first year asked that teachers be removed from duty in the lunchroom and in the corridors during lunch hours. It brought in a petition signed

by 1,290 pupils asking that the recommendation of the council be complied with. From that day to this no teacher has been on duty during the lunch hour. The result has been most gratifying; pupils eat and act like human beings; the waiting line is sometimes two hundred feet long, but there is no crowding or usurping of places. A short time ago the council discovered that some pupils were placing their books on the tables in the cafeteria, thus robbing others of a place to eat. The council attacked the problem at once. On the second day after the council made its appeal the number of cases was reduced to three, and the following day not a single pupil failed to respond to the suggestion.

As has been stated, one of the great dangers is that too much will be expected of the council before it becomes established. It must be safeguarded in every way possible. The pupils will sometimes consider the council a group of "pussy footers" and weaklings because they do so little. The student body must not be permitted to pass judgment too quickly. There is also danger that the council members themselves will become discouraged. They will sometimes be called the teachers' pets and criticized because they do not fight the battles of a particular group of pupils having some special interest or grievance. It will sometimes call for considerable restraint on the part of the faculty committee or the principal to prevent faculty interference when things seem to move too slowly.

But the council members should be let alone as long as they are making an honest effort. They may stumble along, sometimes fall, but democracy is an experiment even with adults. Who will say that we do not oftentimes flounder? Pupils will enter profoundly upon the solution of their problems. They will be in dead earnest; they will work in a spirit of co-operation with the faculty. Who will say that citizenship is not in the making through such practice?